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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2018 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Winner Chosen

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Competition committee is pleased to announce the recipient of the 2018 award. Judith Pransky, author of *The Seventh Handmaiden*, will receive the award at the annual conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries to be held in Boston, MA, from June 18-20, 2018. The Award is offered annually to an unpublished manuscript that has broad appeal to readers aged 8-13 and presents Jewish life in a positive light.

Set in the time of King Xerxes of Persia, the novel begins with the kidnapping of a young girl and then flashes forward several years to focus on Darya, a young slave who is uncertain of her origins. The story follows Darya and her free friend Parvaneh from service in the household of a Persian army captain to positions in Xerxes's palace as handmaidens to Queen Esther. Swirling around the girls' everyday activities is palace intrigue orchestrated by Haman's henchmen including Behrooz, who has a mysterious and frightening connection to Parvaneh's mother.

Filled with historical details, intrigue, mystery, politics and a host of issues that contemporary readers can identify with, the story has a satisfying ending for both Darya and her mistress Esther and fleshes out the story found in the Megillah. The judges were impressed by the unique approach to the story of Esther, the strongly nuanced characters, the touch of mystery and the relevance of the issues to today's world.

According to Ms Pransky, *The Seventh Handmaiden* was written with her sixth grade ancient history students in mind, and tries "to bring the history and lifestyle of Persia to life, as well as the characters that populate the Megillah and the Jewish story that permeates it." Ms Pransky, a middle school language arts/history teacher, has contributed to Philadelphia area magazines and edited the Marmac Guide to Philadelphia. She has also taught writing to adults and worked as an editor for a textbook publishing company before returning to teaching. *The Seventh Handmaiden* is her first novel for young readers.

In an unusually strong year, the Committee is pleased to name three honorable mention manuscripts: *Go To Yourself* by Stuart Melnick is the story of an Orthodox boy preparing for his bar mitzvah. Through sports he experiences the outside world for the first time and learns about friendship, decisions and their consequences. Diverse characters and a warm family setting are hallmarks of this story. *Raising Canaans* by Catherine Orkin Oskow uses humor to tell the story of a dog-crazy preteen who obsesses over the Canaan dogs that her aunt raises and finally comes to accept that she cannot have a dog. *Reeni's Turn* by Carol Coven Grannick uses verse to follow ballet dancer Reeni from doubt about herself to self-acceptance. The contemporary story focuses on issues common in today's families.

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